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S E R M O N 15

ON THE

NATURE AND OBLIGATION OF

F A I T H

IN THE *MYSTERIES* OF

REVEALED RELIGION:

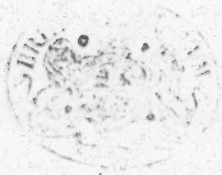
Preached in the PARISH CHURCH of TADCASTER,

On Trinity Sunday, 1792.

Y O R K :

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THOSE readers, who are already well acquainted with the writings of the English divines, will find little new in this sermon, short as it is, except the composition. The very great utility of small religious tracts is however generally acknowledged: there are multitudes of mankind, who cannot, or will not, spare either money, or leisure, or application for the perusal of larger works. And as the writer of these few pages has never met with any such exactly on this subject, he has himself ventured to present one to the public, in a form as compendious, and a style as perspicuous as he was able. At the present time in particular, it is presumed that such a design will be thought commendable: but how far that commendation can be extended towards his performance, must, after all, be left for the reader to determine.

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8 MA64

A
S E R M O N.

ROMANS, xv. 13.

NOW THE GOD OF HOPE FILL YOU
WITH ALL JOY AND PEACE IN BE-
LIEVING, THAT YE MAY ABOUND
IN HOPE, THROUGH THE POWER
OF THE HOLY GHOST.

THE general design of our reli-
gion is to prepare our souls
for the enjoyment of, and to
obtain for us eternal happiness in a fu-
ture state. And the difficulties, which
oppose themselves to this great object,
arise from the wayward prejudices of our
reasoning, and the habits, already con-
firmed, of our lives and practice. The

very constitution, if I may so speak of the soul, impaired by the first inroads of Satan and of Death, has now larger avenues open to the repeated approaches of their powers, and to save us from their galling yoke, has demanded even the highest, the ultimate supply of divine interposition.

These obstacles, the prejudices and habits of a nature thus impaired, we must, it is the duty of our Christian warfare, prevent by our vigilance, and repel by our exertions : animated by “ the God of hope,” and aided by his “ power ;” confiding wholly in our divine Leader, and attached to—allow me to say,—his *person* by admiration and gratitude, we follow the great example of his perseverance and fortitude ; patient and passive ; proving our understanding by a careful obedience,
and

and humbly submitting our own wills to his wise and perfect direction.

But in compliance with the fastidious taste of the times we live in, tinged, as it is, with all the strength and presumption of 'reasoning pride,' we must, however, relinquish the metaphor, tho' so powerfully illustrative of this subject, that our language scarce affords words to express our ideas without the use of its appropriate terms.

Well then ; even these *reasoners* must acknowledge, that man fills but a station, and a *subordinate* station, among the works of his Creator ;—and shall *we* say, “ *Why* hast thou made me thus ? ”—A subordinate situation has only partial and inferior duties ; of the higher concerns it neither requires nor admits

our care: for small concerns a limited *measure* of knowledge can alone be deemed necessary: with such a measure our divine Creator has endowed us; it is a means adequate to the object; and, as his wisdom never works in vain, He has imparted no more.

Shall *we* then presume to canvas his commands, and require proofs of their propriety? Shall we set up ourselves to 'rejudge his justice,' to 'be the God of God?' No: let us tell our stubborn souls, that the Great Lord of heaven and earth, who has given so innumerable proofs—how many more than we yield our attention to!—not only of his power, but also of his wisdom and of his mercy; that *He*, when we call for further testimony of his justice, disdains to account to such
 impious

impious presumption ; but admonishes us only of the danger and folly of our petulant impotence, when compared with the greatness of *his* omnipotence. “ Hast thou,” saith He, “ an arm like God ; or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him ?”

He then has commanded us to observe the distinction between those subjects, which are open to our investigation, and those which are not ; to acquire by diligent application that practical science, of which, as we all admit, He requires in us the *knowledge* ; and humbly and implicitly to *believe* upon the authority of his revelation,—*his*, in whom we have so much cause to trust,—those divine truths, the *knowledge* of which is “ too excellent” for us, and we “ cannot attain unto.” Of such mysteries,

series, it is acknowledged, that there are in the Christian religion a multiplicity ; all of them above reason, but which certainly reason cannot contradict : such are in the province of *belief*, not of knowledge ; but are not therefore the less certain in their own nature ; and our acquiescence and confidence in them,—which is what I understand by the word “ faith,” or, as we find it in the present text, “ *believing*,”—become an act of obedience not less obligatory, and necessary, and reasonable, than any other conformity of our will to that of the Almighty.

These mysteries are bound upon our attention by various exhortations of Scripture, differing only in their degree of earnestness, according to the importance of the several doctrines respectively

spectively in the consideration of our Divine Master, and to the distinction, which they therefore hold among the articles of the Christian faith.

As one of the most distinguished, you will not be surprised, on this occasion, that I cite in particular the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity; a proposition certainly contrary to our reason, if it were asserted concerning any material body, the elementary principles of which are familiarly understood; and as doubtful, if it be affirmed of any mode of existence, with which we are but partially acquainted. Yet even in either case, an assent might, and *must*, have been given upon the strength of authority only: it is no more than a confidence, different indeed in the degree, and in the importance of its consequences, but of the same

same nature with that, which is, on every common occasion, placed by the ignorant in persons of superior information. Thus, by the first impression on our very senses, we know, that we are frequently deceived; and tho' the mistake be often corrected afterwards upon a further advance in science; yet unless that shall happen, and till in fact it does happen, we must rely for the truth on authority alone. But, after all, ' what can we reason, but from what we know?' We cannot then, while all our understanding has but that one primary inlet of organic sensation, we cannot apply our reasoning to that divine essence, the observation of which, we are surely sensible, could never become subject to the organs of men.

But *why* then, it will be said, *why* are we so anxious for what can never
be

be *known*? That very position, obvious as it may now seem, is the most that we “ contend” for. The mode of the divine essence, I again repeat, cannot, and is not required to be *known*: but it is, in a degree, revealed, as an object of *faith*,—of *belief* only; and it is arrogant and presumptuous, it is dangerous, nay it is fatal for us, to refuse to confide obediently in that most gracious revelation. For our faith, as is every where insisted in scripture, is not involuntary, nor void of moral obligation: divine testimony, a good and sufficient foundation, and “ the means of grace,” as materials for the structure also, are liberally given; and certainly then we are criminal in the neglect to use them. Our God did not design us to be mere machines: our faith He has not placed in our minds as a ready
and

and innate endowment, any more than He has that, which we call human learning; but chuses to make use of our industry and application for its attainment; and, in the course of our religious labours, to teach us another lesson of humility; to shew us our dependence on his grace for assistance, and for success on his blessing.

And his grace, the more immediate influence, as we conceive, of the “power of the Holy Ghost,” so sufficient to produce in us the blessed hopes of eternal glory, He faithfully imparts to every soul, which is found in that state of humble and docile simplicity, with which alone its reception is compatible. To a perverse obstinacy of mind, a captious and “contentious” temper, such illuminations even of the divine spirit would be
 useless;

useless; indeed the very notion of their subsistence together seems impossible and absurd : these obstacles He requires us to subdue, as a probationary discipline, the noviciate of our faith : for
 “ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and before honour
 “ is humility.”

In this disposition of soul then let us but once fairly open our New Testament, and with the plain integrity of an honest mind say, whether we do, or do not find such a doctrine there.
 “ There are *three* that bear record in
 “ *heaven*, the Father, the Word, and the
 “ Holy Ghost ; and *these three are one*.”
 Can there be a more positive affirmation ? No : and the word of God is truth. But, alas ! there is sometimes introduced also among our religious
 affairs,

affairs, what is observed,—God knows *how* often!—in the transactions of common life, a base ungenerous cunning, which it may require indeed abilities and learning to contend with, but only a little artless honesty to despise.

Having thus seen, that the faith required of us, with this purification of our will as preparatory to it, is indeed but our reasonable service, let us proceed, in the last place, to observe how replete we find it with the fullness of “all joy and peace” in our present life, and with the abundance of “hope” from that which is to come; effects, of which, according to our text, it is naturally and exclusively productive.

These blessed fruits spring not indeed immediately from that stem of our religion,

ligion, the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity; they depend on the particular branch of redemption by the Son: but the authority for both,—and it is a subject of authority and confidence,—is the same. We find, that the two doctrines are inseparably connected in the same inspired books; and that the whole fabric of revelation must stand, or fall, together. If there be any man, who bears the name of a Christian, that should foolishly wish to exalt the Saviour of mankind above this co-equality, let him reflect how little that divine person has countenanced such a presumption. “Who-
 “soever,” saith He, “speaketh a word
 “against the Son of man, it shall be
 “forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh
 “against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be
 B “forgiven

“ forgiven him, neither in this world,
 “ neither in the world to come.

Should we then reject the authority of scripture all together, and suppose, for a moment, the whole Christian religion to be but a collection of “ cunningly devised fables:” what is then the state of our minds at present, and what is their prospect in futurity? Even in its present state, with all the hope of what it leads to, is human life so unqualified a felicity? Does the world exhibit no instances of evils, no vexations or oppression, ‘ labour or penury, the racks of pain, disease or sorrow?’—What then will it become when we are robbed of the consolations of heaven, and are parted from that anchor of our hope, the faith of Jesus Christ? What *then* is our prospect of futurity,

futurity, even at the best, but a blank only and a chaos ! But how truly miserable indeed is that soul, in which all is become perplexity and doubt, desolation and despair !—— For the falsity of our tenets, supposing them to *be* false, the sceptic never can *know* ; as neither on *this* side is the question a subject of our knowledge : to trust to credence, *a* belief, is as necessary on the one hand, as on the other ; and all the difference between the two faiths is only the absurdity, the danger and impiety of the one, and the truth, the security and happiness of the other. Yet to all these present sufferings, besides those tremendous threatnings, which I mean not to describe, are we persuaded, like froward children, obstinately to expose ourselves, for the sake of persisting in an act of disobedience ; an act, from

which our officious advisers pretend not that we can derive any benefit; and for which we must relinquish the promise of pleasures, such as “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive;” those pleasures “which are at God’s right hand *for evermore.*”

8 MA 64

“Now the God of hope fill *you* with all joy and peace in believing; that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost;”—to whom, with the Father and the Son, be ascribed all honour and worship, might, majesty, and dominion, both now and for ever.

THE END.

8 MA64

BY THE SAME HAND.

A

S E R M O N

ON THE PROGRESS OF

DIVINE REVELATION.

Preached in the PARISH CHURCH of

ST. MARY in BEVERLEY,

ON SUNDAY the 13th of APRIL, 1788.

“To us, who profess ourselves old-fashioned in our Religious Notions, it would have given Pleasure if this Sermon had been less *compressed*. The Connection between the several Revelations of the Mind of God to Man is laid down with so much Perspicuity, that no Man, who is not wilfully blind, can avoid seeing it; insomuch, that we doubt not the Writer, who is as much unknown to us as the Occasion of his Discourse, is qualified both to prove and assert the Doctrines here advanced in their fullest Extent.”—*Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. 59, page 1025.

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